

MINUTES
Virginia Board of Education
School and Division Accountability Committee
July 27, 2011
2:00 p.m.
Jefferson Conference Room, James Monroe Building

Welcome and Opening Comments

Dr. Virginia McLaughlin, Chairman, convened the meeting with the following members present: Mrs. Sears, Mr. Foster, Dr. Cannaday, Mrs. Saslaw, Mrs. Castro, Mr. Krupicka, and Mrs. Beamer, and Mr. Braunlich. Dr. Wright, superintendent of public instruction, was also present.

Request for Waivers Related to the Testing Schedule and the Standards of Learning Assessments

Mrs. Anne Wescott, Assistant Superintendent for Policy and Communications, introduced the five superintendents who were present to discuss their respective proposals for a waiver related to the Standards of Accreditation and the SOL testing schedule. The following superintendents were present:

- Dr. Patrick Russo, Henrico County Public Schools
- Dr. Jack Dale, Fairfax County Public Schools
- Dr. Lorraine Lange, Roanoke County Public Schools
- Dr. Pam Moran, Albemarle County Public Schools
- Dr. James Merrill, Virginia Beach City Public Schools

Dr. Lange began by expressing the gratitude of the superintendents for the opportunity to speak to the committee regarding their proposals for flexibility in SOL testing. The proposals are included as attachments. Dr. Lange noted that each of the five local school boards have adopted their respective proposal by unanimous vote. She stated the goal is to make the Virginia SOL assessment program the best in the nation. Dr. Lange outlined the proposals' two main points: (1) to give SOL tests early to a select group of students at the middle school level deemed ready to be tested by their classroom teachers; and (2) to have the flexibility for multiple testing windows for re-testing at the end of the year. The divisions want more flexibility at the middle school level in reading and mathematics. Dr. Lange said that the proposals have the support of the Virginia School Board Association and the divisions' middle school principals. The group has received a letter of support from the Virginia Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Dr. Lange reported that Roanoke County is double-blocking mathematics and English courses. She added that the flexibility described in the recent press release from the Virginia Department of Education did not relate to the flexibility that the five divisions are requesting. The proposals ask for the flexibility to "teach, test, then re-test."

Dr. Merrill stated that the divisions want to give students the opportunity to show that they have learned what they are supposed to learn. Parents can opt their children out of the earlier testing window, if desired. Differentiation in the classroom is crucial to good teaching, and the

proposals will give teachers greater opportunity for differentiating their instruction. Dr. Merrill noted that the superintendents would be happy to provide additional information to the committee, if needed.

Mrs. Castro asked whether all middle schools in the five divisions were doing the double-blocking schedule described by Dr. Lange. The panel of superintendents responded that some were, and some were not. Mrs. Castro asked about the input for the classroom teachers in the divisions. The superintendents responded that some teachers have been consulted, and additional consultation with teachers will happen once school is in session again. The divisions are also attempting to involve their PTAs. Divisions have heard no negative feedback from the persons consulted so far. Dr. Lange added that parents that she has spoken with in her division like the opt-out provisions.

Mrs. Sears spoke of the recent op-ed in the *Richmond Times Dispatch* written by the chair of the Albemarle County School Board. Mrs. Sears asked how teachers would determine when students were ready to be tested. Dr. Lange replied that the SOL could be used as a diagnostic test to determine what content the student still lacks, then the student can be re-tested after being re-taught the material. Mrs. Sears asked how a student be tested on material that the student has not yet been taught. Dr. Lange responded that no student will be tested until after the appropriate instruction.

Mrs. Sears asked what happens with the children who are not prepared to take the SOL tests during the earlier testing window. Dr. Lange responded that all children will receive an enriched curriculum.

Mrs. Saslaw asked how the proposals accommodate the new mathematics and English SOL assessments coming out in the next two years. Dr. Moran responded that teachers have been working on the pacing and curriculum guides and will continue to do so. She also noted that the division is integrating the Response to Intervention Program with the proposal. Dr. Russo said that this would be an opportunity for a partnership with the state to pilot the proposal.

Mr. Krupicka asked if the proposals would lead to student tracking. He added that he wants to hear more from the teachers in the respective divisions. Dr. Dale described how the flexibility in testing ties into his division's Program of Studies. Dr. Moran said that some students learn more quickly than others, thus may be ready to test earlier. Dr. Lange emphasized that Roanoke County is opposed to student tracking. Every student would take the same test, just at different times.

Dr. McLaughlin asked what else would have to happen in the divisions for the proposals to be implemented successfully. She noted that narrowing of the curriculum may be an unintended consequence of the SOL assessment program. Dr. Russo said that the proposals require a change in the culture of the school division and he indicated that teachers should not be fearful if student scores decrease.

Mr. Braunlich asked the superintendents what the re-testing would cost and expressed concern that the proposals will result in tracking as an unintended consequence. He also stated that he

was disappointed in that the proposals' statements of anticipated outcomes were not specific regarding the resources that would be needed and how the divisions intended to address the change in culture that successful implementation would require.

Dr. Lange responded that under federal requirements, the goal of a 100 percent pass rate is the target for 2014. Dr. Lange also responded that the U.S. Department of Education (USED) projects that 82 percent of the schools in the nation will not make the target. Dr. Lange also indicated that the proposals brought by the superintendents will help schools in Virginia reach that target by enabling re-tests for those students who do not make the pass score on the first testing.

Mrs. Beamer noted that the differentiation being discussed already exists in the schools. Schools have the flexibility to differentiate instruction and to test at the end of the year. Dr. Dale responded that the differentiation does exist and that the proposals provide a way to raise the schools' pass rate from 80 to 90 percent to 100 percent. He added that this flexibility is particularly important for special needs children.

Mrs. Beamer then asked what would happen if a child passed on the first test administration, but then wanted to be re-tested to obtain a pass-advanced score. Dr. Dale said that his staff has discussed this question and how that might be included in the proposal.

Dr. Cannaday noted that the current proposals are more specific than the versions discussed at the previous committee meeting (May 17, 2011) in that the revised proposals now specify only the middle school level included in the proposals. He added that teacher input needs to be addressed, and the input needs to go beyond anecdotal evidence. Dr. Cannaday stated that the proposals need to address how the plan will create the necessary differentiation systemically across the schools and help teachers. The proposals need also to clarify which comes first: teaching, learning, or testing. Dr. Cannaday asked about the divisions' timelines for implementation and planning for success. He added that the proposals need to address clearly the compelling reason why the implementation will create better schools and better instruction for children.

Dr. McLaughlin closed this part of the agenda by asking what are the other components in the school culture that must change in order to make implementation of this proposal successful.

Requests for Approval of Alternative Accreditation Plans for High Schools with a Graduation Cohort of 50 Students or Fewer

Dr. Kathleen Smith, director of school improvement programs, explained the background for this request. The following table shows school divisions' request for approval of an alternative accreditation plan for the high schools indicated below to meet the Graduation and Completion Index (GCI) benchmark for schools with a graduation cohort of 50 or fewer students.

Name of School Division	Name of School(s) Submitting Alternative Accreditation Plan	2010 GCI Index
Bland County	Bland High	97

	Rocky Gap High	98
Colonial Beach City	Colonial Beach High	82
Craig County	Craig County High	89
Danville City	Galileo Magnet High	97
Dickenson County	Ervinton High	83
Highland County	Highland High	98
Richmond City	Franklin Military Academy	94
	Open High	100
	Richmond Community High	99
	Amelia Street Special Education Center	100
Scott County	Twin Springs High	98
York County	York River Academy	81

Dr. Smith stated that due to the small cohort size, one student can make a significant difference in the GCI. For this reason, the GCI alone is not an appropriate measure for these schools; additional criteria are needed to determine accreditation. The following are being requested by each school division for the accreditation cycles for five years beginning in 2011:

1. The proposed alternative accreditation plan will be used only if the school fails to meet the GCI benchmark for full accreditation AND the cohort size for the graduating class is fewer than 50.
2. The maximum number of GCI bonus points allowable for alternative accreditation will be based upon the size of the On-Time Graduation Rate cohort as follows:
 - 0-14 students, no bonus points assigned: the school division will submit a written appeal to the State Superintendent of Public Instruction.
 - Maximum of 5 points for cohorts of 15-20 students
 - Maximum of 4 points for cohorts of 21-40 students
 - Maximum of 3 points for cohorts of 41-50 students
3. The division will submit a written appeal of the accreditation rating to the Superintendent of Public Instruction for cohort sizes of fewer than 15 students or in cases where special circumstances warrant explanation and consideration in addition to the maximum point values outlined above.

Dr. Smith explained that the Superintendent of Public Instruction will make the final determination if the school division appeals the GCI due to cohort sizes of fewer than 15 students or in cases where special circumstances warrant explanation and consideration.

Each school division has determined additional criteria and measurable thresholds for achieving bonus points based upon individual school data. Each school has submitted between three and six additional criteria, each of which is worth one bonus point if the benchmark is met.

Request for Approval of an Alternative Accreditation Plan from Chesterfield County Public Schools for Chesterfield Community High School

This item was added to the committee's agenda by unanimous agreement. Dr. Smith reported that this item will be on the board's agenda for the next day (July 28, 2011), so she briefly explained the issues involved with this request.

Chesterfield Community High School has just completed its 12th year as an alternative school, specializing in dropout recovery and dropout prevention. Most students who come to Chesterfield Community High School are behind their academic cohort by about two years. Chesterfield Community High School has been *Fully Accredited* for the last three consecutive years and has made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for the last two years. As part of its request for an alternative accreditation plan for Chesterfield Community High School, Chesterfield County Public Schools is requesting a waiver of the following section of the *Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia* so that adjustments may be made to the accreditation calculations for accountability purposes.

Present at the committee meeting were Mr. Kevin Hughes and Mr. Jamie Occasion, both representing Chesterfield County. Mr. Hughes spoke briefly about the substance of the request and thanked the committee for its time and consideration.

Update on the Memorandum of Understanding from Petersburg Public Schools

Dr. Smith introduced Dr. Alvera Parrish, division superintendent, Petersburg City Public Schools. Mr. Kenneth Pritchett, school board chairman, and Mr. John Mayo, assistant superintendent, were also present.

Dr. Smith briefed the committee on the background of the Memorandum of Understanding. Dr. Parrish then provided an update of the school division's progress in its work with lead turnaround partners (see attached Powerpoint.)

Following Dr. Parrish's report, Mrs. Sears asked whether the division will be using the Board of Education's recently adopted teacher evaluation guidelines. Dr. Parrish replied in the affirmative and added that teachers and administrators have already begun the training in response to the guidelines. Mrs. Sears asked whether the division will be utilizing the teacher performance grants. Dr. Parrish replied that both Peabody and Vernon Johns schools were participating in this program. Mrs. Sears also asked how the division works with teachers to help students who come to school from difficult personal circumstances and Dr. Parrish replied that the division will measure growth. The division is working with consultants to help train teachers. Dr. Parrish added that all students are expected to learn at high levels and the division is working with parents and the community.

Mr. Krupicka asked about the division's PALS results and how the results were being used to help children. Dr. Parrish said that these data would be compiled and reported to the committee as soon as possible. Mr. Foster asked if the division leadership felt that the work they are doing

is on the right track. Dr. Parrish replied that she and the other central office staff felt that they were on the right track.

Dr. McLaughlin asked about the apparent drop in preliminary Standards of Learning assessment results for 2010-2011. Dr. Parrish replied that the results for Peabody were disappointing and surprising. The leadership is now putting together a plan to address Peabody's performance.

Dr. Cannaday noted that more work needs to be done but there has been considerable positive gain in the past few years, especially in the number of schools now accredited and in the percent of teachers rated as highly qualified. He suggested that Petersburg schools should work closely with social service agencies to address the needs of children.

Mr. Braunlich expressed his interest in receiving an update on progress made regarding the management efficiency review done in Petersburg a few years ago. Dr. Wright suggested that this could be on the agenda of the committee in the near future.

Dr. Wright announced that Ms. Roberta Schlicher will be the new Chief Academic Officer for Petersburg and thanked Dr. Dorothea Shannon, who has announced her retirement, for her work in that role.

Closing Discussion

Dr. McLaughlin opened the floor for discussion. Mrs. Sears expressed her concern about the proposals brought to this committee by the division superintendents. She stated that the proposals need much more work because they are not fully developed at this point and leave many questions unanswered. Mrs. Sears also is concerned that the proposals will create more testing, rather than less.

Dr. McLaughlin stated that the committee is not ready to entertain a formal request for a vote on the proposals. Dr. McLaughlin emphasized that the committee and the board need a clear idea regarding the specifics of the proposal.

Mrs. Saslaw noted that the committee has asked for specific information and responses to questions; however, clear responses have not been forthcoming. Questions regarding the strategies to be implemented are still unclear.

Mrs. Beamer added that this matter should not be added to the agenda of the committee or the board until questions are answered.

Adjournment

The committee meeting adjourned at 4:35 p.m.